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DEVIANCY AND SOCIAL CONTROL I:
WHAT MAKES BIBOI RUN

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I

Biboi, the young chief of the Mundurucu¹ village of Cabitutu, visited the village of Cabrusa with great frequency. So frequently in fact that he once made the ten hour round-trip in one day. Inquiry revealed that Biboi was on the horns of a dilemma. Though he was chief of Cabitutu, he kept a young and pretty wife in the house of his father, the chief of Cabrusa. Whenever he visited his wife, his "followers" in Cabitutu busied themselves in plotting against him. Hearing of these threats to his authority, he would immediately dash back to reassert his position of leadership. But as soon as he was out of sight of Cabrusa, the men of that community sought to tarnish the virtue of his wife; this was not a difficult task, and half the men of the village ultimately enjoyed her favors. Their exploits were well publicized, and Biboi, hearing of his cuckoldry, would hurriedly retrace his steps. During most of the time we lived in Cabrusa, Biboi gravitated between the two communities--to the great amusement and deep satisfaction of his fellow Mundurucu.

On the lowest level of explanation, I have already stated what makes Biboi run. But the key questions of why the men of Cabitutu plotted against him and why those of Cabrusa pursued his wife can only be answered through an analysis of Mundurucu society and culture and of Biboi's position within it. For Biboi was a marginal man trying to play traditional social roles to which he had not been socialized, and he failed to define correctly the nature of the role expectations or the values that pertained to specific social situations. His cumulative blunders finally threatened the stability of this small society, and certain processes were set in motion to reestablish the normal flow of social interaction. Anthropologically, this is a study in deviancy and social control. Humanistically, it is a tragedy but, like many tragedies, one that has overtones of comedy.

II

Biboi's personality was most deviant, and I shall spell this out in terms of his manifest behavior, as it compared with the normal behavior of Mundurucu men and their chiefs. I know nothing of the socialization of Biboi, only that at an early age he went to live in the household of a local Brazilian who traded in the village headed by Biboi's father. He came back to live among his people, but he was no longer a Mundurucu, any more than he was a Brazilian. When I first met Biboi, he addressed me in backwards Portuguese and in a swaggering manner introduced himself as "Biboi, son of Cassiano [the chief of Cabrusa] and chief of Cabitutu." This contrasted markedly to the diffident and hesitating way in which most Mundurucu addressed me, and

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- 114 each other. Though I was an outsider, I had at the time been several months
 157 with the tribe and this departure from what I expected of a tribesman upset
 me considerably. Biboi turned out to be a great problem in other ways. He
 cited his own importance as a justification for the demands that he made on me
 for gifts. And he bragged continually of his ability to deal with whites, to
 lead his followers, to hunt, or to do almost anything in either the realm of
 354 traditional Mundurucu activity or in their relationships with the outside world.
 355 He strove desperately and openly towards the acquisition of prestige and of
 material goods, which he had accepted as indicators of prestige. For this reason
 our mosquito boots were admired greatly, as this would surely differentiate
 him from his barefoot Indian fellows—shortly after one of his visits, my wife
 discovered that her boots were missing. And we set no other Mundurucu so brash.
 157 They felt free to enter our house at all times, but only Biboi would demand a
 cup of coffee and then lie in our hammocks; he was quite offended when we pointed
 out to him that his body paint was staining them. Biboi had other most
 unusual characteristics. He spoke freely and critically of other men to us and
 did this even in the presence of third parties. Nor did he bother to conceal
 his hostility and contempt when someone inimical to him was near. But under-
 neath this façade, Biboi was a frightened and anxious man. He would often
 158 confide to me darkly that "people are talking about me." Lest this be inter-
 preted as paranoia in the clinical sense, I should stress that people were
 indeed talking about him, and Biboi had every reason to be anxious. Not only
 his ego but his very life was in danger.

III

- 157 Biboi's behavior grated against almost every single point of Mundurucu
 183 expectations regarding how a chief should act and how men, in general, should
 behave. Mundurucu society is intensely egalitarian and based upon the prin-
 181 ciple of maintenance of solidarity among a group of males who are conceived
 161 to be peers. It has a peculiar structure in that it is divided into patrilineal
 societies, which in turn are differentiated into a number of patrilineal
 clans. But the normal mode of residence is matrilineal, and men generally move
 to the villages of their wives. This disperses the clans throughout all the
 villages, for a young man, when he marries, leaves the father from whom he
 obtains clan membership. It also produces a dualism of loyalties in which the
 man maintains a clan identity and, with it, defined role obligations and also
 acquires membership and roles in the village of his wife. This produces a
 classic form of organic solidarity, for the society is bound together by cross-
 cutting segments. But it is a very simple form of organic solidarity and an
 578 extremely brittle one. Social cohesion must be vigorously maintained and
 181 individual strivings muted, for alliances in cases of conflict cannot range
 along simple segmental lines. To support a fellow-clansman in a crisis may
 pit a person against his village mates and vice versa. In a society with a
 population of only 1,300, living in communities of 60 to 100 persons, such
 stresses are serious threats to social stability in any event; in one of the
 Mundurucu type they may be totally disruptive. The social system not only pro-
 duces solidarity but requires it for maintenance.² Given the structure of
 Mundurucu society, the effective social actor was one who was cooperative,
 unaggressive, serene, quiet, and willing to place the will of the collectivity
 before his own. It may be immediately perceived that Biboi presented a threat
 183 to propriety and to the social system. He was belligerent, loud, self-centered
 and acquisitive—all the things that a Mundurucu should not be.

Like all people, the Mundurucu are, to an extent, prestige-seekers, but there are cultural differences in the coinage of status. The traditional culture placed no value upon material acquisitions, and, although this was slowly changing, Biboi's tastes were inordinate and clearly derived from his experience among the Brazilians. He thus violated a value standard and at the same time offended the entire community by self-consciously and openly trying to raise himself above his fellows.

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Biboi not only misconstrued the ends of Mundurucu prestige but he also misunderstood the means for their attainment. The primary rule, and the one he most flagrantly violated, was that one should not seek prestige but let it come to him naturally. For example, bravery in war was highly valued but the posture of bravado was ridiculed. A coward was relegated to the lowest end of the status scale, but one who boasted of the damage he intended to inflict upon the enemy in the coming battle was ridiculed and placed in the vanguard of the attack. To attain prestige a man should be modest and unassuming, while observing all the traditional expectations of what constitutes valued behavior. But primarily, he should act always as if he had only the collective well-being and goals in mind. Biboi's braggadocio, individualism, and competitiveness had violated every rule of the game, and he won only dislike and contempt, rather than the esteem and power he wanted so badly.

Disturbing though all this was to the delicate adjustment of Mundurucu social structure and contrary though his behavior was to the values that bound this adjustment, Biboi had committed the cardinal error. He had allowed his grievances against certain individuals and groups to come out into the open and alignments emerged for and against him that cut across both village and clan-linked role commitments. Hostilities and latent factions are part of the tribal life of the Mundurucu, but they are carefully repressed--a requisite for the functioning of Mundurucu society. The average Mundurucu is well-trained in disguising aggression and in presenting the bland face of neutrality, but Biboi's own socialization was in part derived from Brazilians and was not adjusted to the functional needs of the Indian society. Like any cuckold, he had some cause to feel aggrieved. His error was in openly objecting to the offense against him, a normal course for a Brazilian cuckold but not for a Mundurucu victim.

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IV

Biboi's alienation from Mundurucu society induced severe anxiety and intensified his quest for a favorable identity. He sought this through his role of chief of the village of Cabitutu. The contemporary Mundurucu chieftaincy must be understood as a boundary role. The dependency of the Indians on manufactured goods, obtained through the sale of wild rubber, has given the Brazilian traders a position of great influence among them, which they exercise through the chief. When the trader wants increased production he tells the chief, who then exhorts his followers to greater effort. Correspondingly, the chief acts as bargaining agent for the village in trade negotiations, and the people interpret his role to be in large part that of their representative to the outer world. If the trader is sufficiently well-established with a village, he can do much to influence the choice of a chief. But since he cannot completely counter the patrilineal rule of inheritance of

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439 the chieftaincy, it is common practice to select one or two possible heirs and
 622 rear them in his household; this is what happened to Biboi. This is agreeable
 to the chief, for he gains the favor of the trader and, with it, preferential
 treatment in sales and purchases. It is clearly beneficial to the trader, as
 he hopes thereby to install a chief who will be responsive to his wishes, even
 at the expense of the Mundurucu villagers.³

The contemporary Mundurucu chief is in a dilemma. If we look upon a
 boundary role as one in which both ends have to be played against the middle,
 we see the chief caught between the interests of the trader and those of his
 followers; these interests rarely coincide. It is a difficult position, but
 one that can be maintained by maximal adherence to the traditional behavior
 expected of chiefs and minimal acquiescence to the demands of the traders.
 Biboi's father, Caetano, played a comparatively successful role. If the trader
 told him that the villagers were heavily in debt to him, Caetano would commu-
 nicate this fact and suggest that it would be well to collect more rubber; he
 never attempted even verbal coercion. He also sincerely sought to obtain the
 maximum return for his people.

622 Caetano embodied many characteristics of the traditional chief. An older
 man, he carried himself with a modest and unassuming dignity. He guided, per-
 suaded and cajoled, but he carefully refrained from ordering people, and all
 decisions of communal significance were made in consultation with the mature
 men of the village. Beyond this, Caetano knew Mundurucu traditional knowledge
 and lore and attempted to perpetuate it.

622 Biboi's position was very different from that of his father, for he was
 177 the prototype of the Indian boy who had been "educated" by a trader and later
 installed as a chief. He had no legitimate claim to the position, and it was
 necessary for the trader to insist that he would recognize only Biboi in deal-
 ings with Cabitutu. The residents grudgingly assented, but they regarded him
 as chief only in trade relations. The most influential man of the village was,
 [756] in reality, a renowned shaman who was the son of the last chief and was con-
 sidered the legitimate heir to the office.

622 Biboi's precarious situation was made worse by the fact that he was under
 554 thirty years old and the junior of many men in the village. To complicate mat-
 [591] ters, he had no supporting group of kinsmen in Cabitutu. Matrilocality, I have
 said, is the normal mode of residence among the Mundurucu, but the sons of
 chiefs generally remain with their fathers after marriage. From the point of
 view of conscious motivation, the sons of chiefs remain patrilocal because their
 fathers are influential enough to persuade men to relinquish their daughters to
 them as a means of solidifying relations with them. By the same line of reason-
 ing, a young man who marries the daughter of a chief is willing to join a
 prestigious father-in-law. But from the point of view of social structure, the
 function of the patrilocality of the chief's family is twofold. By keeping the
 sons, the chief is able to transmit authority to them without the discontinuity
 that would result if they were resident in the villages of their wives. More-
 over, the chief is surrounded by a group of patrilineally related kin, a small
 and solidary patrilineage. His position is further enhanced by the fact that
 he has sons-in-law within the village. Much as this may reinforce his prestige,
 it does not enable him to exercise unilateral authority, for the rest of the

village men are ever-watchful and jealous of the chiefly family and would be quick to resist, however passively, what they considered to be high-handedness. Biboi, however, did not have the surrounding group of relatives that may have given even minimal support to his claim to leadership. Rather, he depended upon the trader and his father and relatives in Cabruá to buttress his position. 622
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Given his delicate status, Biboi proceeded to worsen it through a misinterpretation of the chieftaincy. He had listened to his father's nostalgic tales of the role of the chief in times past, and one might say that he had some knowledge, in a purely cognitive sense, of the traditional culture. It is highly dubious, however, that Biboi had internalized sufficient culture to make him an effective actor within the system of social relationships. Biboi knew that "in the old days, chiefs were powerful men who directed their people and bought goods for them." This view of the past may or may not have been true, but it surely did not apply to the present. Biboi, nonetheless, announced at large that he was eminently qualified to be chief, as only he knew how to deal with the trader and only he had the force to tell the people how, when and where to work. I was a special recipient of this information, for Biboi found it most important to gain stature in the eyes of a prestigious outsider. But Biboi also told all the others of his importance, and the people of Cabitutu stated that he indeed relayed the demands of the trader in forceful terms. His "followers" saw him solely as an agent of the trader in their village, and they were certain that his only function was to promote their exploitation and defraudment. Their analysis was correct, but I doubt that Biboi thought his role to be at all asocial. There is no evidence to substantiate this, for only he could tell me whether he was aware of the machinations of the trader, and he did not. But I believe that Biboi saw the trader as a father figure, many of whose values he had internalized and subscribed to as legitimate. And he also saw himself to be in the position of a strong and traditional leader. [57]

Biboi had learned something else about the chiefs of times past, and this was the fact that many were polygynous. Polygyny was possible only for chiefs, for the matrilocality that applied to most of the population made it most difficult to have plural wives unless they were sisters. Even for a chief, however, polygyny was a difficult and stormy relationship, and it was evidently never of very great frequency. [57]

Biboi did not have the implicit and unconscious ability to understand the fine points of Mundurucu social structure that a man raised in a village would have, and he made some of his most serious blunders in marriage. Soon after assuming the chieftaincy of Cabitutu, he married a woman of the village, a widow several years older than himself who, through the situational variability of post-marital residence, had a strong nucleus of kin in the village. Though I have no data upon which to make a firmer statement, it is quite probable that he married the woman--frankly a crone--in order to enlist the sympathies of her relatives. But Biboi was a young, handsome and virile man, and he subsequently sought a wife more to his liking. He located a pretty girl of about sixteen years in the village of Decodyem and brought her home to Cabitutu. This enraged the first wife, who berated Biboi, assaulted the girl and complained to her brothers. The latter expressed their disapproval of the polygynous union to Biboi, and the rest of the village supported them. Biboi's general behavior and his exercise of his "chieftaincy" had already outraged them, and this [57]
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595 offense against his first wife, a native daughter of the village, was beyond
 578 their endurance. Biboi refused to divorce the new wife, to whom he was greatly
 attached, but took her to Cabrua where he left her in the care of his father.
 [622] He validated his polygyny by pointing to the tradition that this was a prerogative of chiefs.

V

183 This brings us through most of the key features of Mundurucu culture and
 577 social structure and to the point at which this paper began. And since this
 578 is in essence a tragic tale, we will see in this final section how the ring
 must inevitably close on Biboi. He had offended all the Mundurucu canons of
 taste and ethics and had become a source of strain in this small and tightly
 knit society. Now the forces of social control became operative and he felt
 the heavy pressure of his fellow men.

[754] Having left his pretty bride in the safe confines of his father's house,
 681 Biboi returned to Cabitutu to set matters right and quiet the discontent. But
 he continued in his arrogant and demanding ways and the sentiments of the vil-
 lagers became further inflamed, with no small assistance from his first wife
 and her family. There grew among them a firm determination to kill him, and
 the intention might have been immediately carried out were it not for his ties
 in Cabrua. This was an important collective decision by the residents of
 Cabitutu, for his execution would set off a train of repercussions that would
 seriously disrupt their relations with Cabrua and with the trader. Moreover,
 Biboi did not have shamanistic power and the usual post-hoc explanation for the
 killing of a deviant--that he was a perpetrator of black magic--could not be
 used in his case. But his continued presence was even more disruptive, and
 Biboi's life was placed in serious jeopardy.

554 In the meantime, the person of the young wife was not as secure as Biboi
 684 thought it would be. Her husband was away and she was a rather wayward girl;
 whatever rectitude she possessed was certainly no match for the insistent
 attempts upon her body by the men of Cabrua. Soon, all of the men of the vil-
 lage except those prohibited by incest regulations--and there were some excep-
 tions even to this--were enjoying the favors of Biboi's young wife in the
 underbrush surrounding the village, at the stream, in the forest, in the gar-
 dens, or wherever they might find her alone. The enthusiasm of the men was
 understandable from her physical attractiveness, but there was another compon-
 ent to their attentions. Whenever they related their exploits to me, the men
 would express great satisfaction at what they were doing to Biboi, for the
 Cabrua men, too, disliked Biboi with some intensity. Even in his father's
 village his presence threatened the smooth tenor of social relations, and he
 was considered unbearably deviant. But physical sanctions against Biboi would
 have been impossible in the village in which his father was a chief, and the
 men of Cabrua attacked his manhood instead. There could be no doubt about the
 aggressive character of their seductions, nor of its success in dealing a
 mortal blow to Biboi's prestige by reducing him to a helpless butt of laughter.

Biboi soon heard of the events in Cabrua from members of his family and
 immediately returned. He made frontal accusations against many of the men and
 even mentioned my Brazilian assistant (probably correctly) as being among those

who had cuckolded him. The village reacted to his charges ambivalently. They were highly amused at his discomfiture and humiliation, but they were seriously concerned about the open accusations and threats of violent reprisal. Not only was this a breach of fundamental rules of deportment, but if violence were to break out the social system would be seriously threatened. The village soon became ranged on two sides. Biboi's family supported him, but the majority of the population were ranked solidly against him. Thus, the threat of conflict had spread from Cabitutu to Cabrua. And Biboi ran back and forth between Cabitutu, where they plotted against his life, and Cabrua, where they took more covert measures against him through his wife.

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The balance of power and of moral correctness lay with Biboi's opponents, and the task of his supporters was made most difficult by virtue of the fact that Biboi had almost ceased to be a social person--the rules no longer applied to him. We left the field before the curtain fell on our little drama, but one could already predict the conclusion. This was seen most clearly when, shortly before our departure, Caetano fell from a palm tree and lay seriously injured for several days. Knowing that the people of Cabitutu would kill him as soon as they were assured of his father's death, Biboi came immediately to Cabrua and remained there until the old man's recovery was certain. During this period, Biboi approached me and said, "You know, if my father dies, I will leave this land and go to live on the banks of the Tapajós River." I asked him why, and, in fine Biboi style, he answered, "Because it is so beautiful there." Biboi knew that his life as a Mundurucu was finished.

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ENDNOTES

- (1) Mundurucu Indians are a Tupian-speaking people of the upper Tapajós River in the state of Pará, Brazil. My wife and I carried out a one year fieldwork program there in 1952-53 with the support of the William Bayard Cutting Traveling Fellowship granted by Columbia University, and a Research Training Fellowship of the Social Science Research Council. 101 114
- (2) A more complete description and analysis of the relation between Mundurucu social structure and the positive evaluation of male solidarity has already been published in an article entitled "Intergroup Hostility and Social Cohesion" (American Anthropologist 59:1018-35, 1957). 554
- (3) I have discussed the general structure of authority and its relation to Brazilian society in detail in my book, Headhunter's Heritage (Berkeley, 1960). 114